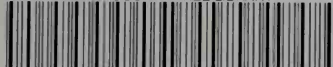


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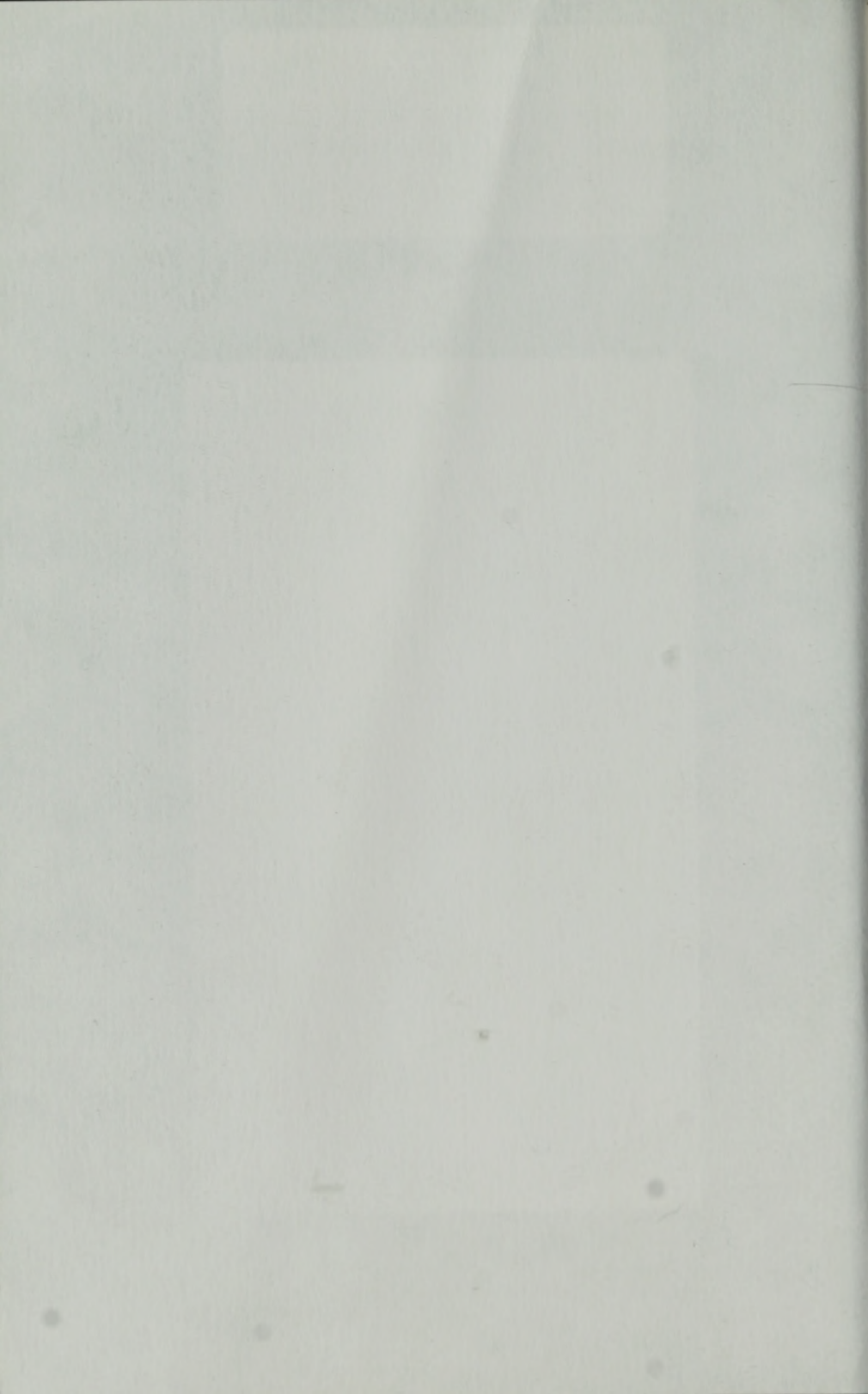
INTRODUCTION BY

JIMMY CARTER

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to this volume, President Jimmy Carter writes that *The Best American Spiritual Writing* "approaches the writing of both poetry and prose as a spiritual discipline, a way to explore the mysteries of the soul and the soul's relationship with God." As always, editor Philip Zaleski has assembled a wide-ranging and wonderfully eclectic collection that delves headlong into that spiritual discipline, looking to inspire, provoke, and offer insight into modern spirituality and religion.

Here you will find Walter Isaacson's brilliant and provocative portrait of Einstein's religious life — a cross between his parents' secularism, his native Judaism, and his Catholic grade-school education. Drawing from his own experience of trying to inhabit multiple worlds, Noah Feldman examines the difficulties facing faith communities as they adhere to tradition yet also strive to be modern, in "Orthodox Paradox." When "Meeting the Chinese in St. Paul," Natalie Goldberg, with the help of a broken rhinoceros fan, grapples with this question: how should I live, knowing the world is a confusing place? Pico Iyer weighs in on his tranquil retreat, the holiest place in Japan; Oliver Sacks gives a moving account of a man with retrograde amnesia, striving for a meaningful life devoid of memory; and Ursula K. Le Guin passionately explains, as only she can, the appeal and subtle morality of A. E. Housman's "A Shropshire Lad: XXXII."

Committed to literary excellence, this "invaluable collection" (*Library Journal*) also features poetry from distinguished voices such as Wendell Berry, Maxine Kumin, John Updike, and Charles Wright. As Zaleski writes in his foreword, *The Best American Spiritual Writing 2008* proves that the writing in this edition is a stirring "medium for contemplating, via the things of the flesh, the things of the spirit."



The Best American
Spiritual Writing 2008

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EDITED BY *Philip Zaleski*

INTRODUCTION BY *Jimmy Carter*



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HAMZA YUSUF

Why Holocaust Denial Undermines Islam

FROM *Tikkun*

EPISTEMOLOGY IS A BRANCH OF PHILOSOPHY that studies the nature and basis of knowledge. How do we know things? It also studies the veracity of "truth." How do we know the difference between belief, knowledge, opinion, fact, reality, and fantasy? The Greek philosopher Carneades believed that knowledge of reality, of what is true or false, is impossible, that nothing can be known with certainty; his philosophy is known as skepticism. It does not reject belief altogether; Carneades felt that our belief about any given matter should be subjected to intense scrutiny and then, using a scale of probability, we should accept or reject the likelihood of its truth or falsehood. But we must make no absolute claims to it. Another Greek skeptic, Cratylus, however, was more radical in his approach and believed that nothing could be known at all, and thus no statements could convey anything true or meaningful. He finally gave up talking altogether.

Most of us are neither moderate nor extreme skeptics; we believe what our teachers told us. Although some of us learned later that perhaps a little skepticism was indeed warranted, we survived with our grasp of reality reasonably intact. We live in a world where facts are meaningful and opinions can be assessed, at least to the degree that we deem them sound or unsound. When it comes to religion, those of us who are raised in traditions often reject such assessments and simply believe what we were taught. For many religious people, skepticism is anathema, the work of the devil. However, our Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have al-

ways been concerned with and seriously interested in epistemology, because each of these faiths have profound truth claims that need substantiation or "believability."

Islam, at its advent, developed a sophisticated methodology for the validation of truth claims. One of the greatest achievements of the Islamic scholastic tradition is 'ilm ar-rijaal, the science of narrators. It is the study of reports of events in the life of the Prophet, especially of his sayings and deeds. Its formulators established a rigid set of criteria to validate the truth claims of those who asserted they saw or heard the Prophet do or say such-and-such. Reports were grouped into two categories: *ahad*, or solitary reports, in which one or a few people claimed to have heard or seen something, and *mutawatir*, or multiply transmitted reports, narrated in numbers large enough to preclude collusive fabrication. The solitary reports must meet many criteria before being accepted as sound statements that nonetheless contain, depending upon the degree to which the criteria were met, a certain probability of error. On the other hand, firmly established multiply transmitted reports, in numbers that rule out collusion, are taken as uncontestable fact.

The Quran, the seventh-century book narrated by Muhammad, is considered *mutawatir*, and thus epistemologically undeniable. Whether one believes it is from God or not is another matter, but the Quran in its current form is the same Quran the Prophet taught to his companions more than fourteen hundred years ago; untold numbers in each generation of Muslims have transmitted the same recitation, making it infallible in its historicity and accuracy. Islamic scholars accepted multiply transmitted reports from Muslims and people of other faiths. Upon this epistemological foundation rests the Muslim faith. Creedal matters are deemed valid only if they are buttressed by multiply transmitted traditions that can be traced back to the Prophet. Although Islamic jurisprudence is largely based upon solitary evidence (hence the differences of opinion in the various schools), the Quran and the creed of Islam are both founded upon multiple narratives that achieve an undeniable status. Early Muslim scholars would certainly consider much of our current knowledge of history to have achieved such status. For instance, there is consensus among historians that the Normans invaded England in 1066; too many accounts of this momentous event exist and have been recounted in each generation through multiple sources. In the case of any solitary original

source, healthy skepticism is warranted. When Lee Harvey Oswald claimed to be a patsy, it led to an entire field of conspiracy studies among Kennedy assassination buffs. Did he act alone or didn't he? That aspect of the event is debatable. But was John F. Kennedy shot on November 22, 1963, in a motorcade at Dealey Plaza in Dallas? Far too many accounts of that tragic event exist; to deny it is simply to deny reality and have one's sanity questioned.

Much of what we know about the world and what we accept as truth comes from multiply transmitted accounts. Let's say I claim that Australia doesn't exist and is merely a figment of our imagination, that its origins lie in a whimsical cartographer in the Middle Ages who decided that such a large ocean needed a landmass. And, when confronted with people who claim to be from Australia and can prove it, I dismiss them as part of a conspiracy of cartographers who wish to perpetuate the myth of their forebear. I would be laughed at, or ignored, or deemed "certifiable." While this example seems absurd, many people actually believe things just as fatuous and far-fetched.

Holocaust denial is one such example. As one who has read some Holocaust-denial literature, with the poorly reproduced pictures and claims of the orchestration of these scenes in collusion with the U.S. government, I can attest to the tragic gullibility of people who take such literature as historical truth. To return to the Kennedy assassination, if one reads Mark Lane's version that a rogue element within the CIA killed Kennedy, the "facts" seem overwhelming. But if one reads another version that the Mafia killed Kennedy because of his failure to return Cuba to the gambling lords of Italian America, the "facts" also seem overwhelming. Finally, one can read the version that Mossad killed Kennedy because he wanted to force nuclear inspections in Israel, and again the "facts" seem conclusive. Each of these accounts is presented with utter certainty by the "researchers." In the end, reality is manipulated to meet the needs of the mythologist. Indeed, we are all entitled to our own opinions, but not to our own facts. And those who present alternative versions of "reality" tend to reject everything that does not suit their theory, and cherry-pick and interpret everything — facts, innuendoes, or "coincidences" — that does.

In the case of the Holocaust, the facts are clear and transmitted from multiple sources. Tens of thousands of Jewish and other individuals who survived the death camps and other horrors of Nazi

Germany lived to tell of it. Nazis were brought to trial, evidence was presented in court, and they were convicted. Mass graves were found, and gas chambers were discovered, which were clearly not delousing rooms as some callously claimed. The ovens exist and cannot be reduced to an efficient way of preventing cholera outbreaks or disposing of victims of starvation. I have personally met many Holocaust survivors and their children. I have seen tattoos. I have also heard firsthand accounts of the horrific events. The numbers and details of such events may be legitimate areas of research and inquiry for scholars, but questioning whether the events took place at all undermines the epistemological basis of our collective knowledge. Muslims, of all people, should be conscious of this as their religion is predicated on the same epistemological premises as many major events in history, such as the Holocaust. To deny such things is to undermine Islam as an historical event. That a "conference" examining the historicity of the Holocaust should take place in a Muslim country hosted by a Muslim head of state is particularly tragic and, in my estimation, undermines the historicity of the faith of the people of that state.

In our inherent contradictions as humans, and in order to validate our own pain, we deny the pain of others. But it is in acknowledging the pain of others that we achieve fully our humanity. A close friend of mine, a professor of religion in a Muslim country for many years, recently told me that his wife, an English teacher in that country, had wanted to use *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* as a text for her Muslim pupils. But the school administrators repeatedly denied her request because they deemed it inappropriate reading for young Muslims. It is sad that the current political morass in the Middle East has led to this intolerable refusal to confront a people's collective suffering. Perhaps in acknowledging that immense past of Jewish suffering, in which the Holocaust is only the most heinous chapter, Muslims can better help the Jewish community to understand the current Muslim pain in Palestine, Iraq, and other places. In finding out about others, we encourage others to find out about us. It would greatly help our Jewish brethren to know the historical facts of Jewish experience in the Muslim world, which are often heartening and humanizing and very different from their European experience. In our mutual edification, we grow together.

John Updike's books have won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Recent publications include *Due Considerations: Essays and Criticism*; *Terrorist*; and *Americana and Other Poems*.

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JIMMY CARTER was born in Plains, Georgia, and served as the thirty-ninth president of the United States. He and his wife, Rosalynn, founded the Carter Center, a nonprofit organization that prevents and resolves conflicts, enhances freedom and democracy, and improves health around the world. He is the author of twenty-five books, including the acclaimed spiritual biography *Living Faith* and its companion, *Sources of Strength*.



PHILIP ZALESKI, editor, is the author of many acclaimed books on religion, including *Prayer: A History* (cowritten with Carol Zaleski). He is a research associate in the department of religion at Smith College.

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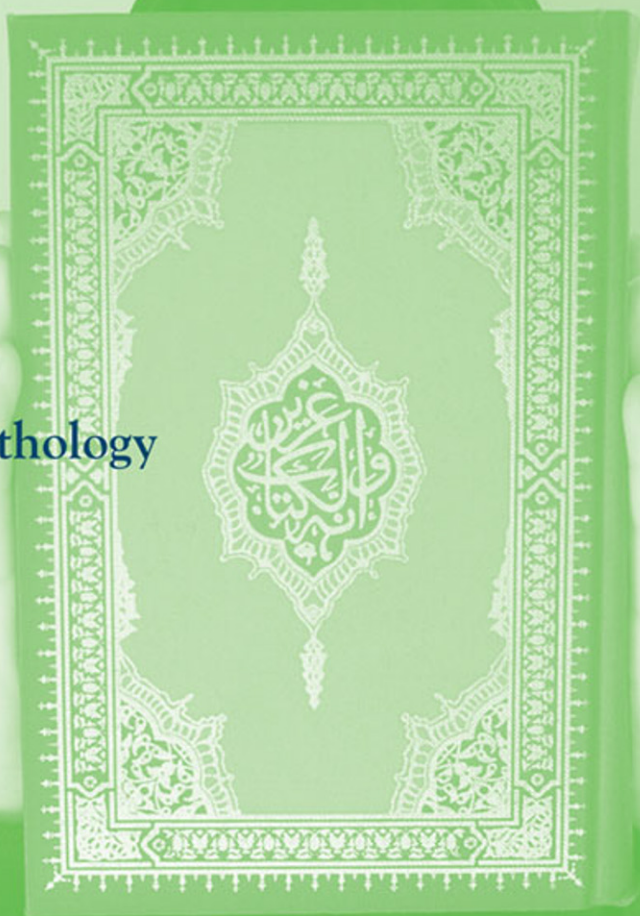


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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ISLAMIC TERRORISM

An Anthology



Edited by

*Marvin Perry and
Howard E. Negrin*



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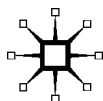
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“HOLOCAUST DENIAL UNDERMINES ISLAM”

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf

In recent years Nazi apologists and anti-Semites have deliberately and cruelly manufactured a new myth—that of Holocaust denial. These people argue that during World War II the Germans had no policy of extermination; that Jews invented the Holocaust to gain world sympathy for Zionism and to wrest enormous indemnity payments from innocent Germans. Holocaust denial, which flies in the face of all documentary evidence, including the testimony of eyewitness survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders, demonstrates anew the willingness of anti-Semites to embrace and propagate the most grotesque beliefs about Jews. This myth now circulates widely in the Arab/Muslim media, including mainstream publications.

In the following piece, published in *Tikkun*, a liberal Jewish journal, Hamza Yusuf condemns the Iran-sponsored conference of Holocaust deniers as a tragic event which undermines respect for Islam. Hamza Yusuf was raised in California in a Greek Orthodox family. After surviving a life-threatening car accident at age seventeen, he began reading the Qur'an and eventually converted to Islam. Yusuf spent ten years studying Islam in the Middle East and West Africa. After 9/11 he appeared with President Bush as a symbol of Islamic moderation, and he continues to denounce terrorism as contrary to the true spirit of Islam.

* * *

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature and basis of knowledge. How do we know things? It also studies the veracity of “truth.” How do we know the difference between belief, knowledge, opinion, fact, reality and fantasy?...We live in a world where facts are meaningful and opinions can be assessed, at least to the degree that we deem them sound or unsound....For instance, there is consensus among historians that the Normans invaded England in 1066; too many accounts of this momentous event exist and have been recounted in each generation through multiple

sources. In the case of any solitary original source, healthy skepticism is warranted.... Much of what we know about the world and what we accept as truth comes from multiply transmitted accounts. Let's say I claim that Australia doesn't exist and is merely a figment of our imagination, that its origins lie in a whimsical cartographer in the Middle Ages who decided that such a large ocean needed a land mass. And, when confronted with people who claim to be from Australia and can prove it, I dismiss them as part of a conspiracy of cartographers who wish to perpetuate the myth of their forbearer. I would be laughed at, or ignored, or deemed "certifiable." While this example seems absurd, many people actually believe things just as fatuous and far-fetched.

Holocaust denial is one such example. As one who has read some Holocaust denial literature, with the poorly reproduced pictures and claims of the orchestration of these scenes in collusion with the U.S. government, I can attest to the tragic gullibility of people who take such literature as historical truth.... [Holocaust denial] is presented with utter certainty by the "researchers." In the end, reality is manipulated to meet the needs of the mythologist.

Indeed, we are each entitled to our own opinions, but not to our own facts. And those who present alternative versions of "reality" tend to reject everything that does not suit their theory, and cherry-pick and interpret everything—facts, innuendos or "coincidences"—that does.

In the case of the Holocaust, the facts are clear and transmitted from multiple sources. Tens of thousands of Jewish and other individuals who survived the death camps and other horrors of Nazi Germany lived to tell of it. Nazis were brought to trial, evidence was presented in court, and they were convicted. Mass graves were found, and gas chambers were discovered, which were clearly not delicing rooms as some callously claimed. The ovens exist and cannot be reduced to an efficient way of preventing cholera outbreaks or disposing of victims of starvation. I have personally met many Holocaust survivors and their children. I have seen tattoos. I have also heard firsthand accounts of the horrific events. The numbers and details of such events may be legitimate areas of research and inquiry for scholars, but questioning whether the events took place at all undermines the epistemological basis of our collective knowledge. Muslims, of all people, should be conscious of this as their religion is predicated on the same epistemological premises as many major events in history, such as the Holocaust. To deny such things is to undermine Islam as an historical event. That a "conference" examining the historicity of the Holocaust should take place in a Muslim country hosted by a Muslim head of state is particularly tragic¹ and, in my estimation, undermines the historicity of the faith of the people of that state.

In our inherent contradictions as humans, and in order to validate our own pain, we deny the pain of others. But it is in acknowledging the pain of others that we achieve fully our humanity. A close friend of mine, a professor of religion in a Muslim country for many years, recently told me that his wife, an English teacher in that country, had wanted to use Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl* as a text for her Muslim pupils. But the school

administrators repeatedly denied her request because they deemed it inappropriate reading for young Muslims. It is sad that the current political morass in the Middle East has led to this intolerable refusal to confront a people's collective suffering. Perhaps in acknowledging that immense past of Jewish suffering, in which the Holocaust is only the most heinous chapter, Muslims can better help the Jewish community to understand the current Muslim pain in Palestine, Iraq and other places. In finding out about others, we encourage others to find out about us. It would greatly help our Jewish brethren to know the historical facts of Jewish experience in the Muslim world, which are often heartening and humanizing and very different from their European experience. In our mutual edification, we grow together.

NOTE

1. The allusion is to the conference organized in 2006 by the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to "debate" whether the Holocaust really happened.

- April 27, 2005, Serial No.109-34 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), pp. 25–30.
3. Daniel Benjamin, Prepared Statement, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on European Affairs, *Hearing on Islamist Extremism in Europe*, 109th Congress, Second Session, April 5, 2006 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), pp. 52–56.
 4. From Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), pp. 77–80, 82–87, 90–91. Reprinted courtesy of the author c/o Writers Representatives L.L.C. All rights reserved.
 5. From John Rosenthal, “The French Path to Jihad,” *Policy Review*, No. 139 (October/November 2006), pp. 40–46, 48–50, 52–59. Reprinted by permission of *Policy Review*.
 6. From Nonie Darwish, *Now They Call me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel, and the War on Terror* (New York: Sentinel, 2006), pp. 148–150, 152–153, 203–204, 212–214. Copyright © 2006 by Nonie Darwish. Used by permission of Sentinel, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. For online information about other Penguin Group (USA) books and authors, see website at <http://www.penguin.com>.

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3. Dr. Umayma Ahmad Al-Jalahma, “Jews Use Teenagers’ Blood for Purim Pastries” *Al Riyadh* (Saudi Arabia), March 10, 2002, trans. Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), <http://www.memri.org>, MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, No. 354 (March 13, 2002). Reprinted by permission of MEMRI.
4. “Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement,” Hamas: Gaza, August 1988, in Simon Wiesenthal Center, *Selected Translations and Analyses* (Los Angeles, CA: Simon Wiesenthal Center, Fall 1988). Reprinted courtesy of Simon Wiesenthal Center Library and Archives.
5. Tariq Ramadan, “Muslims Against Anti-Semitism: Ways to Promote Common Values,” *UN Chronicle*, No. 4 (December 2004–February 2005), pp. 35, 37. Reprinted by permission of the UN, the author of the original material.
6. Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, “Holocaust Denial Undermines Islam,” *Tikkun* (July/August 2007), pp. 26–28. Reprinted from *Tikkun: A Bimonthly Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture & Society*, and www.tikun.org.

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Why Holocaust Denial Undermines Islam

by Hamza Yusuf



Auschwitz

EPISTEMOLOGY IS A BRANCH OF PHILOSOPHY that studies the nature and basis of knowledge. How do we know things? It also studies the veracity of "truth." How do we know the difference between belief, knowledge, opinion, fact, reality and fantasy? The Greek philosopher, Carneades, believed that knowledge of reality, of what is true or false, is impossible, that nothing can be known with certainty; his philosophy is known as skepticism. It does not reject belief altogether; Carneades felt that our belief about any given matter should be subjected to intense scrutiny and then, using a scale of probability, we should accept or reject the likelihood of its truth or falsehood. But we must make no absolute claims to it. Another Greek skeptic, Cratylus, however, was more radical in his approach and believed that nothing could be known at all, and thus no statements could convey anything true or meaningful. He finally gave up talking altogether.

Most of us are neither moderate nor extreme skeptics; we believe what our teachers told us. Although some of us learned later that perhaps a little skepticism was indeed warranted, we survived with our grasp of reality reasonably intact. We live in a world where facts are meaningful and opinions can be assessed, at least to the degree that we deem them sound or unsound. When it comes to religion, those of us who are raised in traditions often reject such assessments and simply believe what we were taught. For many religious people, skepticism is anathema, the work of the devil. However, our Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have always been concerned with and seriously interested in epistemology, because each of these faiths have profound truth claims that need substantiation or "believability."

Islam, at its advent, developed a sophisticated methodology for the validation of truth claims. One of the greatest achievements of the Islamic scholastic tradition is 'ilm ar-rijaal, the science of narrators. It is the study of reports of events in the life of the Prophet, especially of his sayings and deeds. Its formulators established a rigid set of criteria to validate the truth claims of those who asserted they saw or heard the Prophet do or say such-and-such. Reports were grouped into two categories: ahad, or solitary reports in which one or a few people claimed to have heard or seen something, and mutawatir, or multiply-transmitted reports narrated in numbers large enough to preclude collusive fabrication. The solitary reports must meet many criteria before being accepted as sound statements that nonetheless contain, depending upon the degree to which the criteria were met, a certain probability of error. On the other hand, firmly established multiply-transmitted reports, in numbers that rule out collusion, are taken as uncontested fact.

The Quran, the seventh century book narrated by Muhammad, is considered mutawatir, and thus epistemologically undeniable. Whether one believes it is from God or not is another matter, but the Quran in its current form is the same Quran the Prophet taught to his companions more than 1,400 years ago; untold numbers in each generation of Muslims have transmitted the same recitation, making it infallible in its historicity and accuracy. Islamic scholars accepted multiply-transmitted reports from Muslims and people of other

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